

Comments for White House Conference on Aging

Listening Session - December 8, 2004

My name is Bob O'Connor and I am the chairman of the State of Illinois Council on Aging - a 23 citizen and 8 legislator member advisory group to the Department on Aging. I am pleased to be here today to indicate briefly the concerns of the Council which need to be conveyed for consideration at the 2005 White House Conference on Aging.

It was my honor to serve as a delegate to the 1981 and 1995 White House Conferences. I can assure you that I feel that I have aged sufficiently in the intervening years to hopefully have some insight with my Council colleagues as to the WHC challenges.

The Council went through a process this past year of indicating what we believe are the most urgent challenges to seniors and for planning for services. The top five were:

1. Review of the status of pharmaceutical assistance programs to gauge their effectiveness and need for improvement.
2. The issue of wages for direct care workers.
3. Effective consumer education.
4. Viewing systems for integration of health care, health prevention and health promotion.
5. Review of issues involved in nursing home care.
6. Understanding of overall funding (public/private) of aging services.

By the way, our Council members developed 28 priority issues before considering a top 10 or 12.

At the same time we were doing this, the Department itself had been developing its strategy plan. Some of their priorities were obviously very similar - including provision of adequate funding, expanding home and community based services and improving access to better health care.

And of course what is very clear is that all of us are facing the same challenges in 2004 that we found in 1981 and 1995. It is not a case of reinventing the wheel - we have all been

there - it is a case of making that wheel roll faster with less bumps or breakdowns, and in a truer direction.

The challenge of the 2005 WHC on Aging is to refocus on the clear, compelling and still existing challenges facing seniors and to develop plans of action both on the national level and at the community level to effect changes.

Thank you.